AU/AWC/RWP115/97-04

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

RUSSIAN STRATEGY IN CHECHNYA:A CASE STUDY IN FAILURE

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Curriculum Requirements

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April 1997

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burder for this collection of information is estibated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burder to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED (FROM - TO)
01-04-1997	Thesis	xx-xx-1997 to xx-xx-1997

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
Russian Strategy in Chechnya: A Case Study in Failure
Unclassified

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
5b. GRANT NUMBER
5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)
Lutz, Raymond R. ;

5d. PROJECT NUMBER
5e. TASK NUMBER
5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS
Air War College
Maxwell AFB, AL36112

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME AND ADDRESS
,

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
APUBLIC RELEASE
,

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

Russia initiated activity in Chechnya as a covert intelligence operation. It changed into an internal security mission which, in turn, became a mid-intensity conflict and then evolved into in a low-intensity conflict. The low-intensity conflict exposed the weakness of the Russian military and drove the country to the brink of economic and political disaster. Despite massive use of air and ground power a grossly inferior force could not be beaten. The principal reasons for the failure included the lack of a clear and attainable national objective, a dysfunctional national military strategy and operational miscalculations as conventional tactics and doctrine were applied to a low-intensity conflict situation. Other reasons for the failure included the inability of the frail economy to support both ?guns and butter,? the role of the independent media which shaped resistance to the war, and a general inefficiency within the military. The aftermath of the Chechen campaign may dramatically alter the future role of the military in the Russian republic. The conflict also provides notable examples concerning the use of airpower which are worthy of further analysis.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
			Public Release	60	Fenster, Lynn lfenster@dtic.mil
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER International Area Code Area Code Telephone Number 703767-9007 DSN 427-9007

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Preface

The December 1994 invasion of Chechnya was the culmination of a three year conflict between the Russian federal government and the separatist Chechen republic, but the causes for the war extend back for decades. Specific Russian reasons for fighting included constitutional, economic, nationalist, religious and political issues.

The broader consequences of the Chechen conflict are still in dispute and the eventual end state of the conflict is undecided. Preliminary assessments can be made concerning the national objectives which Russia sought to achieve and the military strategy used in it's effort to attain them. It is here that the failure of the Russian effort becomes most apparent. The objectives were ill-defined. The strategy and force structure which were used were inappropriate. Russia misjudged the military capability and the national resolve of both it's people and the Chechens. It misunderstood the nature of the war it would face. The Russians brought in a force structure, doctrine and tactics which were unsuited for the nature of war it would face. It's military did not have the operational art designed to fight an insurgent movement.

This study will analyze the invasion's air campaign. The campaign had four phases. Of the phases, those directed against conventional Chechen forces were successful but the air campaign failed as fighting evolved into a guerrilla war. Lessons can be learned from the campaign concerning the use of Airpower in low-intensity conflicts particularly the relative impotence of typical attack and bombing missions. Chechnya provides a window

to view the nature of low-intensity conflicts and the difficulty of conventional forces to fight them. This is particularly important for US military thinkers to recognize as the practical experience of Vietnam is lost with the retirement of the people who fought it.

Finally, the costs of the Chechen conflict could give rise to eventual outcomes which could directly impact upon Russian-US relations including an increased risk of nuclear confrontation, a rise in military influence within the Russian government, or a coup which overthrows the fledgling democracy.

Abstract

Russia initiated activity in Chechnya as a covert intelligence operation. It changed into an internal security mission which, in turn, became a mid-intensity conflict and then evolved into in a low-intensity conflict. The low-intensity conflict exposed the weakness of the Russian military and drove the country to the brink of economic and political disaster. Despite massive use of air and ground power a grossly inferior force could not be beaten. The principal reasons for the failure included the lack of a clear and attainable national objective, a dysfunctional national military strategy and operational miscalculations as conventional tactics and doctrine were applied to a low-intensity conflict situation. Other reasons for the failure included the inability of the frail economy to support both "guns and butter," the role of the independent media which shaped resistance to the war, and a general inefficiency within the military. The aftermath of the Chechen campaign may dramatically alter the future role of the military in the Russian republic. The conflict also provides notable examples concerning the use of airpower which are worthy of further analysis.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In December 1994, Chechnya leaped into Western headlines. The invasion of Chechnya suggested that Russia had resumed the role of the "Imperial Bear," squashing minorities with overwhelming military might. In reality, Russia merely engaged in operations which it believed were in it's vital national interests.[1]

Russia was embroiled in a conflict which lasted over 18 months and cost thousands of lives. It was defeated in battle and the conflict played a role in it's current destitute and unstable condition. The future may be shaped by events in a peripheral republic by a third rate military force which brought Russia to it's knees.

The failure in Chechnya cost Russia dearly. It is unlikely that the conflict has been resolved. Although some analysts might claim that the death knell has sounded for Russia, projections of it's demise are premature. The republic has taken a major blow in it's efforts to pursuit of a post-Soviet state. It is probable that life after Chechnya will be greatly altered and the resulting shifts in Russian politics could have significant impacts on relations with the US.

The conflict drained Russian military strength, particularly ground force power in the Caucasus. It revealed schisms in the fabric of the military strategy and shortfalls in

combat readiness. Acquisition efforts and force modernization were delayed. The national economy could not support both war and modernization.

Russian national objectives in Chechnya provide insights into why the supporting military strategy and force structure failed. Russian ground operations were unsuccessful. The air force engaged in a full spectrum of operations short of nuclear strikes, but the success of airpower was mixed. Initial blockade and air interdiction operations against a conventional Chechen National Guard were successful. As the invasion evolved into a low-intensity conflict (LIC), Russia employed sorties and sophisticated weaponry on an unprecedented scale but airpower was ineffective against ill-equipped rebels with minimum air defenses.[2]

Notes

[1] "To Die for Chechnya?" *National Review*, XLVII/1, (1995), 17-18.

[2] Pavel Felgengauer, "Call-up: No Professional Army Yet In Sight In Russia," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/18, (1995), 16-17.

Chapter 2

General Discussion Of The Area And Setting

Geography And Weather

Chechnya is slightly larger than Connecticut. The Desert Storm envelopment covered a distance twice as long as Chechnya at it's widest point. The population was several million at the time of the invasion but between one-sixth and one-quarter of the inhabitants died or migrated during the conflict. In general, the population was semi-rural and possessed a strong identification with the Islamic religion and extended family ties. The northern third of the republic is semi-arid steppes with elevations below 500 feet. The middle third of Chechnya is bisected by rivers which run west to east. Elevations range from 500 to 1500 feet. The northern and middle thirds of Chechnya are fertile and temperate. Most of the population lived in Grozny, the capital, and other towns and villages of this area. Oil pipelines, rail lines, three hard surface airfields and two minor air strips are also located in this area.[1] The terrain in the south rises sharply to over 14,500 feet. This area is sparsely populated. It features narrow valleys, sparse vegetation, a poor road network and untrafficable slopes. Chechnya is surrounded by Georgia in the west, Dagestan in the east, Azerbaijan in the south and Russia in the north.

Weather had adverse strategic and operational impacts which were mentioned repeatedly by Russian authors.[2] Hitler and Napoleon learned the harsh lessons of winter. The Russian military ignored these lessons. The introduction of troops at the onset of winter was ill-advised and unnecessary.[3] The factors which led to the invasion were present before winter. They were not so imperative that the invasion couldn't be delayed until the spring.

Winter weather is poor to fair. Migratory storms cause icing, snow and turbulence. The mean number of days with precipitation or strong winds is 15 days per month. Near arctic conditions are present at higher elevations. Over 50 percent of the days each month feature cloud cover in excess of 75 percent. Less than 10 hours of available light daily restricts electro-optic surveillance.

Spring weather features a slight reduction in the number of cloud covered days but frontal systems create precipitation and gale force winds almost one-third of the time and muddy ground restricts trafficability. Summer weather is generally fair with moderate temperatures at all but the highest elevations. The most frequent flight restrictions are afternoon showers and thunderstorms, especially in the highlands. Gale force winds are expected 30 percent of the time especially in canyons and valleys. Ground temperatures seldom drop below freezing in the late spring but icing can be expected on aircraft. Fall weather conditions are poorest over the mountains which are frequently obscured by clouds and showers. Rain falls on 30 to 50 percent of all days. Cloud cover or gale force winds preclude air drop or airborne reconnaissance 30 to 50 percent of the time.

The weakness of Chechen forces dictated that they use adverse weather for concealment. Airpower cannot operate effectively in poor weather. Air strikes were

useful against conventional or fixed targets during marginal weather but their value against small mobile bands of insurgents in inclement weather was minimal. Air sorties were often canceled for days at a time due to poor weather. Precipitation, limited visibility and wind precluded effective target designation and degraded delivery accuracy as rebels withdrew into towns and mountains. It was not enough for all-weather aircraft to be able to take off and land. They must loiter at low altitude and accurately deliver fire in all weather conditions. Munitions must also be all-weather capable. Poor weather was clearly a factor in the loss of flexibility and offensive power. If aircraft sorties couldn't launch or locate targets, the complexity of other operations was compounded. Resupply airdrops and air assaults also played a role in Chechnya. The Russians had some of the world's best airborne equipment but it was often ineffective because drop minimums were not achieved.

Reconnaissance and surveillance are particularly important in LICs. Cloud cover, low light conditions and precipitation cut airborne and spaceborne reconnaissance capabilities and increased the possibility of enemy surprise. The rebels launched offensives with little warning. Their success was based partially on Russian inability to collect airborne intelligence.

Historic Setting

The Russian fascination with the Caucasus dates back to Czarist times. So does a fear of the Caucasians. In the late 1700s, Russia began to conquer the region in a brutal, protracted invasion which decimated one half of the inhabitants. By 1864 the region was conquered but periodic violence continued until 1944 when Stalin deported the Chechens

to Siberia and Central Asia. Over one-third of the population perished in exile. The remaining Chechens did not return to their homeland until 1957.[4] The present conflict is a continuation of the contentious history. The hatred between the Chechens and the Russians is an underlying factor for the conflict.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) collapsed in 1991. Some republics formed independent states. Chechnya remained part of Russia but felt the involuntary subordination denied it power and privilege. Dudayev, a former Soviet air force general and *de facto* leader of Chechnya, overthrew the Moscow-supported government, declared independence and held an election in October 1991. He won by a large margin. Yeltsin declared the unsanctioned election void and dispatched Interior Ministry troops to restore control. The Chechens took them hostage until Yeltsin renounced the use of force. Russia attempted to exert control in November 1992 ostensibly to stop Chechen support to secessionist movements in neighboring areas, to halt violence against ethnic Russians and to contain the spread of organized crime. Interior Ministry troops moved to the border but withdrew under threat of a regional armed reaction.[5]

Relations worsened through 1994. Russia was reasserting economic, military and political influence in the Soviet successor states. Chechnya's separatism interfered with Russian reintegration and diplomatic efforts. Chechens in Russia were subjected to expulsion. The strident tenor of the propaganda grew. Russian domestic pressure demanded a crackdown on Chechen lawlessness particularly as it spread beyond the confines of the Caucasus.

The Dudayev government was subject to internal pressures which brought it to the verge of dissolution. Violence and the breakdown of government control worsened.

Opposition groups attempted a series of failed coups secretly funded and supported by Russia. The ineffectiveness of the coup attempt, the growing violence between the pro-Moscow and Dudayev factions, the mounting flow of refugees and the increasing violence against ethnic Russians prompted Yeltsen to demand all parties lay down their arms or face Russian intervention. The Russians sought regional stability. The Chechens fought for their survival and freedom.

In December 1994, Russian forces launched a three pronged ground attack toward Grozny. The seizure of the Chechen capital was the primary objective of the attack. The main attack was halted by it's commander when he stated that he would not attack fellow Russians. Of note, the commander was also a personal acquaintance of Dudayev Some Russian units resisted the order to advance and in some cases, troops sabotaged equipment. In other units, the desertion rate grew. Antiwar protests occurred in Moscow and in staging areas in surrounding republics where the people hated Russian occupation.

The assault created a constitutional crisis, an uproar in the *Duma* and splits in the political and military hierarchy. Two deputy defense ministers and the deputy commander of the invading army vilified the operation or refused to participate on moral and professional grounds. Emil Pail, a member of the Russian presidential council, resigned to protest the invasion. General Vorobyov, the deputy commander of ground forces, resigned rather than take command of the invasion. He said, "It is necessary to save Russian and get out of the situation that has developed in the country, in Chechnya and the Armed forces…it is impermissible to act according to the principal of let's stick our nose in and then see what happens."[6]

Many junior and intermediate officers voiced their reservations concerning the attack. This would be tantamount to assistant secretaries of defense, generals, cabinet members, National Security Council members, and a significant number of the junior officers joining in a protest against the orders of the US commander-in-chief. Such protests and fractures would rock any government.

The Chechen resistance delayed the invading forces and inflicted heavy casualties on mechanized units in restrictive city and mountain terrain. Two of the advancing columns were completely halted. The Chechens regained their balance and mustered defenses against the late December storming of Grozny.

Eventually ground forces, supported by effective air support, seized key objectives such as airfields and the capital using standard, conventional Soviet (Russian) tactics. The advance on Grozny culminated in a building by building attack. Losses were heavy and timetables to achieve objectives were delayed.

Russia installed a puppet government and pursued Dudayev's forces which had reverted to guerrilla operations. Chechen forces hid in towns and mountains and struck Russian strongholds and forces with raids and ambushes until the most recent declaration of a cease-fire.

Insurgent Actors

The Chechens are mountain tribesmen with no love for communism or Russians. They are individualists with a warrior spirit instilled by culture, geography, history and religion. They are hardened to harsh conditions, skilled in fieldcraft and dedicated to their cause.

Dudayev spent three years preparing Chechnya for battle. He mobilized men between the ages of 15 to 55. He seized Russian military and paramilitary depots, armed the general population and constructed caches, strongpoints and underground facilities. 10,000 Chechens were in the National Guard in December 1994. The rebel force grew rapidly, encouraged by Dudayev's mobilization initiatives and the brutality of the Russian attack.[7] Despite heavy casualties, 40,000 full and part-time insurgents supported by a significant portion of the population were under arms in early 1996. Many rebels had prior military training and combat experience.

Most rebel equipment was seized from the Russian military in 1992.[8] Major systems included:[9]

- 23 x air defense guns
- 108 x APC/tanks
- 24 x artillery pieces
- 5 x MiG-17/15
- 2 x Mi-8 helicopters
- 24 x multiple rocket launchers
- 17 x surface to air missile launchers
- 94 x L-29 trainer aircraft
- 52 x L-39 trainer aircraft[10]
- 6 x An-22 transport aircraft
- 5 x Tu-134 transport aircraft

Other weapons were purchased from republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Captured material and weapons illegally obtained from corrupt Russian soldiers were integrated into the inventory to offset captured and destroyed Chechen equipment. A large amount of ammunition and small arms was seized or purchased.

Unconfirmed media reports persist that Chechnya forces included 300—2,000 Afghan, Iranian and other "volunteers." The reports created concern in Russia which feared a militant, Islamic North Caucasus state.

Russian Military Actors

The invasion was conducted by a multidivisional force composed of North Caucasus Military District (NCMD) troops augmented with airborne units, Interior Ministry troops and special forces from the Intelligence Service.[11] Air support was provided by more than six helicopter squadrons (including two Mi-24 and two Mi-8 squadrons), Long Range Aviation (LRA) and the 4th Air Army. Up to 40,000 soldiers participated in the invasion providing Russia an overwhelming numerical advantage but the initial assault was conducted in a somewhat piecemeal manner. Thousands of Russian troops were killed or wounded. Moscow underestimated the sorry state of "first-rate" NCMD forces and the demoralizing effect fighting fellow Russians and Muslims. Shortly after the initial assault, Russia withdrew NCMD forces and replaced them with more reliable forces from other districts after the initial defeats. Units from virtually every district rotated through the conflict including the Naval (light) Infantry as the war evolved into urban and mountain combat.[12]

Notes

[1] Defense Mapping Agency, Aerospace Center, "Tactical Pilotage Chart," Map TPCXXF04C, (St. Louis, MO: DMA, 1980).

[2] "The Military and the Militants," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/1, (1995), 2.

[3] Pavel Felgengauer, "Apocalypse Now," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/1, (1995), 5.

[4] John Keegan, "The Warrior's Code of No Surrender," *US News and World Report*, (23 January 1995), 47.

[5] Stuart D. Goldman & Jim Nichol, 2-3.

[6] Pavel Felgengauer, "Gen. Vorobyov On the Reasons for His Resignation," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVI/51, (1994), 8.

[7] "Map Showing Chechen, Russian Positions," *Joint Publications Research Service* (JPRS) JPRS-UMA-95-007, (1995), 1.

Notes

[8] Natalya Gorodetskaya, "According to Intelligence Reports, Dudayev's Army Consists of More Than 20,000 Men," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/5, (1995), 12.

[9] Yu. Bespalov & Valery Yakov, "Who Armed Dzhokhar Dudayev?" *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/20, (1995), 12.

[10] The relatively large number of L-29/L-39 trainer aircraft in Chechnya were the legacy of air force training regiments which were located in the Republic. Some of these aircraft had been fitted with bomb racks.

[11] "Chechnya Invasion," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/18, (1995), 14.

[12] "Operations Renewed After Cease Fire," *JPRS*, JPRS-UMA-95-003, (1995), 20.

Chapter 3

Reasons For The Invasion

National Unity

> *The longer the situation in the Chechen Republic goes on, the greater the destructive effect on Russian's stability. It has become one of the main internal threats to our state's stability*
>
> —Boris Yeltsen

Moscow feared if Chechnya was permitted to withdraw, the Russian Federation would tumble. Many ethnic groups in the federation, especially those in the North Caucasus, wanted to withdraw or pursue independent policies. Russian leaders viewed the recent experience of the breakup of the USSR as a compelling example of the danger of further dissolution of Russia. Chechnya could not be allowed to flaunt the constitution. An analogy might be drawn to the US Civil War. The North viewed preservation of the Union as the cause of the war. Anotoly Chubais expressed this same sentiment when he said, "There is one absolute priority for me. This priority is Russia's territorial integrity."[1] Many Russians viewed the Chechen situation as an internal (national unity) problem. Most of the world accepted this view. The US Secretary of State noted, "It's not in our interest or certainly theirs to have a sort of disintegrating Russia."[2]

Access And Oil

Chechnya is part of the land bridge between the Black and Caspian Seas. It lies astride historic north—south and east—west trade routes. The area is also viewed as an historic avenue to warm water ports. Vital oil pipelines, the region's only rail lines and the Baku-Rostov Military (high capacity) Highway transit the area. The highway and railway are essential to regional commerce. Lateral movement along the threatened southern flank would also be problematic without the security of these transportation lines. During the course of the conflict, rebels often cut the rail and roadlines causing severe disruptions to Russian military operations and regional commerce.

Chechnya is Russia's southern flank bordering Georgia. It is in striking distance of Russia's traditional Turkish rival. The proximity to Iran is a double-edged sword given Iran's extremist government and expansionist policy. Russia's fear of southern neighbors infringing on it's sphere of influence has long been a concern.

Chechnya lacks concentrated heavy industry with the critical exception of petroleum. Chechnya has proven reserves of approximately 150 million barrels. The annual refining capacity is approximately 72 million barrels. 90 percent of Russia's aviation oil was produced in Chechen refineries before the war. Without Chechen refineries, Russian civil and military airpower is restricted in sources of unique petroleum products.[3] Most Caspian and regional oil production also passed through Chechnya. The revenue Russia would lose in transit fees and refinery profits from Azerbaijan, Georgia and other states to an independent Chechnya would be enormous.

Religion And Ethnic Hatred

Russia considers itself to be the frontier of Christianity stopping Islamic expansionism into Europe. Chechnya is the northernmost concentration of Muslims with 600,000 Sunni and Sufi Muslims. Russia feared Chechen Muslims for the following reasons:

- Dudayev's call for a "holy war;"
- Fear of Muslim mercenaries entering Chechnya;
- Growing influence of Islam in the Caucasus states;
- Historic distrust of Islam and it's expansionist history;
- Moscow's traditional identification with the Russian Orthodox religion.

Muslims were viewed with suspicion given Iranian and Turkish inroads into the Caucasus and the conflict with Islamic extremists in Tajikistan and on the Afghan border. Russians also remembered that Islam was a unifying element in the 18th century Caucasian wars.[4]

Islam is a central component of Chechnya's ethnic identity.[5] Dudayev mobilized the resistance by emphasizing the Islamic identity of Chechens swearing his inaugural oath on the Koran. Chechen propaganda calls for a *Gazarat* (holy war) were successful.

Muslims viewed the Russian denunciation of Islam with concern. Russians do not trust Muslims. 60 percent of the population in Moscow is "anti-black" (anti-Muslim). A common feeling was, "Moscow is the third Rome; not the second Mecca."[6] Russia could not divorce itself from the historic mistrust of Islamic expansionism. Chechnya was the final line of defense to a northern movement of destabilizing religious influences and Russia's "destiny" was to protect Christianity. Russia was concerned over the perceived cultural and economic inroads foreign Muslims are making. Chechen leadership's call for a *Gazarat* reinforced Russian alarm.[7] Russia may have failed to see the fundamental

nationalist role of Islam which prevailed over tribal differences and unified the opposition. Russia certainly suffered from an ethnic contempt for Chechens and Islam. This misplaced chauvinism and arrogance blinded Russians from an understanding of the enemy's motives for resistance.

Stability, Security, And Refugees

The Chechnya region has become a hub for drugs and weapons trafficking. Democracy does not mean the absence of power, order and conscious discipline.[8]

No geographic area has the right to secede from Russia. The Chechen Republic has become the center of gravity of all extremist and nationalist forces. The regimes in the republic had become a source of heightened criminal danger, above all for Russia. The wholesale plundering of trains traveling through Chechnya has become a real disaster. The longer the situation goes on, the more destructive an influence it has on stability in Russia. It has become one of the principal internal threats to the security of our state.[9]

Yeltsen's statements above exemplify the concerns of the general Russian population about Chechen lawlessness. The Russian national character favors personal stability and security. Russians have a low tolerance for criminals. For nearly 50 years in most areas crime wasn't a daily fact of life. After the collapse of the USSR, crime became rampant. It was the major concern of the Russian people. 71 percent of Russians believed Chechnya was invaded to halt Chechen-inspired crime, but 12 percent believed the invasion was to punish Chechen leaders who had backed out of deals with Russian leaders to pay them off. Little evidence supports this conspiracy theory but it persists within the Russian press and within the foreign diplomatic corps in Moscow.[10]

Chechen criminal groups ranged widely and rapidly achieved infamy for their recklessness. Chechnya was a hotbed of international criminal activity ranging from banditry, to drug and weapons dealing, to money laundering.

By late 1994, estimates of refugees varied between 200,000 and 380,000 refugees with more than 130,000 forced migrants. Most ethnic Russians fled in the face of mounting Chechen violence.[11] They were largely skilled and occupied key positions in the region's political and economic structure. The refugees and migrants have become a drain on social services as well as a fertile ground for political opposition to the existing Russian government.[12] The cost of resettlement or repatriation is expected to be enormous and is projected to place a continued strain on the economic future of Russia.

Dudayev was "out of control" in the eyes of Russian leaders. Russia became frustrated and perceived a need to "do something." Yeltsen personally disliked Dudayev. As his rule became more dictatorial and neglected Russian desires, he was isolated and his position became precarious. Dudayev was boxed into fighting or flight. He fought. Chechnya was an internal security issue for Russia, but it was a life and death struggle for the rebels.

Russian leaders perceived a lack of global security as it's traditional buffer states fell. The west was pushing closer in initiatives such as the "Partnership for Peace." Russia felt hemmed in and threatened. Russian leaders may have seen the forcible occupation of Chechnya as "drawing a line on the steppes" to the outside world displaying the might of the Russian state and indicating a hostility toward further destabilizing expansionism on the part of the west or Islamic worlds.

Notes

[1] Rozalina Ryvkina & Yu. Simagin, 14.

[2] James Gallagher, "Chechens Remain Defiant," *Chicago Tribune*, (14 December 1995), Sec. A, 1.

[3] Fiona Hill, "*Russia's Tinderbox: Conflict In the North Caucasus and it's Implication for the Future of the Russian Federation*," (Boston, MA: JFK School of Government, Harvard University, 1995), 2.

[4] Paul Goble, "How Islamic Is the War In Chechnya?" *The Prism*, 1/6, (1995).

[5] John P. Hardt, *Beyond Chechnya: Some Options for Russia and the West*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 1995), 2.

[6] "Planned Muslim Center Disturbs Muscovites," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVI/32, (1994), 11.

[7] Fiona Hill, 102-105.

[8] Dmitry Volkov, "Most Political Leaders Oppose Yeltsen On Chechnya," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVI/50, (1994), 4.

[9] Boris Yeltsin, "Address By Boris Yeltsin," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVI/52, (1995), 7-9.

[10] LTC Kathleen Sweet, USAF Assistant Attaché to Russia, discussions with author, Maxwell AFB, AL, various dates 1996.

[11] Tatyana Regent, "More Than 200,000 People have Left Chechnya In the Past 3 Years," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVII/94, (1994), 1.

[12] Stuart D. Goldman and Jim Nichol, 78-79.

Chapter 4

Objectives And Strategy

National Objectives

To this day, no one has formulated a strategic goal.

—Colonel General Gromov's

Colonel General Gromov's quote above clearly states a widely held view concerning the desired outcome of the invasion. The operations in Chechnya displayed the Russian government's strategic incompetence in internal security and military operations. The failure to defeat the Chechens reflects the profound incongruence between the national objectives and the supporting doctrine and strategy. A miscalculation of Chechen and Russian national wills, an unclear acceptable end state and the failure to define conditions for conflict resolution contributed to the break in the critical thread between national objectives, strategy and military goals. Competing *Duma* legislation and executive pronouncements suggested no real framework of a desired end state even though Moscow had clear strategic imperatives. Russia did not have clear, obtainable national objectives when it invaded Chechnya. The absence of a clearly defined grand strategy for the Russian Federation prevented it from translating the imperatives into attainable policies

and objectives. The stated objectives noted below reveal differences between various government officials and highly placed sources defining the goals.

- Assist Interior Ministry troops[1]
- Confiscate weapons from the population[2]
- Consolidate political power in Moscow[3]
- Control the main strategic petroleum and gas pipelines, highways and railroads[4]
- Disarm "gangster" formations and destroy their heavy arms[5]
- Defend Russian state interests[6]
- Eliminate people who stand in the path of all-Russian integration and development[7]
- Eliminate Dudayev's army and return Chechnya to the Federation by any means[8]
- Get rid of Dudayev[9]
- Guarantee territorial integrity[10]
- Install a government amenable to accommodation with Moscow[11]
- Limit emulation of Chechen secessionist movement and stabilize region[12]
- Maintain law and order[13]
- Maintain peace, tranquillity and security[14]
- Prevent the infiltration of illegal armed formations and weapons[15]
- Protect key installations[16]
- Protect citizens from armed extremism[17]
- Restore Chechen infrastructure[18]
- Restore legality and law and order there[19]
- Secure a position relative to surrounding nations[20]

The armed forces had to support a broad range of objectives ranging from broad and ill-defined ones such as consolidation of political power in Moscow to finite, achievable ones such as protecting key installations. Objectives such as installing a government amenable to accommodation with Moscow, limiting emulation of Chechen secessionist movement or stabilizing the region were beyond the capabilities of the military to achieve given the restrictions placed on it.. Nevertheless the military was called upon because other government organizations were incapable of effectively pursuing them. Some objectives were beyond the traditional scope of Russian military operations such as those focused on law enforcement and internal security. Many officers felt objectives other

than the defense of the national borders against external threats were tangential. They resisted these sorts of missions. Senior officers were largely holdovers steeped in the legends of the Great Patriotic War, raised during the Cold War, and rejecting their Afghan defeat. They were pulling together the remains of the Soviet military and looked at the success of the coalition in the Gulf as the model for the future. Many national objectives were not translated effectively into achievable missions. The requirements which were levied on the military could not be easily supported by the existing doctrine or strategy.

Military Strategy

The politicians seem totally unable to formulate, in any complete and precise way, a definitive mission for the troops.[21]

Q: How would you evaluate the strategy and tactics of the Armed Forces in Chechnya?

A: There is nothing to evaluate in this case inasmuch as neither strategy nor tactics are observed.[22]

The geostrategic changes of the late 1980s altered Russian national interests, politico-military perceptions of those interests and the military requirements which support them including the ability to engage in LICs. The force inherited from the USSR was neither properly configured nor equipped to meet national objectives of internal security, law enforcement or peacemaking yet the changes to meet the emerging security needs were slow in coming.[23] The military leadership's resistance to change, defense funding shortfalls and the disruptions created by the breakup of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet military were principal causes delayed the process of modifying the doctrine and

force structure to engage in LICs yet the military was still committed to a LIC at a time of transition and turmoil.

Russian review of the military requirements noted that the armed forces should maintain a strategic nuclear force and a comparatively small general purpose force to repel aggression under the most difficult conditions using modern and advanced means of armed combat. The requirement remained to maintain combat readiness and to support a trained reserve in event of a regional or large scale war. There was also a growing requirement to engage in LICs and peacekeeping operations but these were dismissed by military leaders who insisted protection of the national borders as the sole mission.[24]

Doctrine

Russian military doctrine underwent disruptive, doctrinal changes in the decade before Chechnya. To Russians, doctrine is not general theory. It is officially approved principles and practices which are mandatory for armed forces.

In the early 1980s, a doctrine and vision of the future which constituted a military-technical revolution (MTR) based on emerging technologies such as airpower and precision weapons was promulgated but not fully implemented due to costs and political hierarchy shifts. Marshal Ogarkov, Chief of the General Staff, defined the vision is a series of speeches, writings and lectures. The doctrine was published in a series of documents including the capstone document *Tatika*. The MTR featured restructuring of the force and development and introduction of advanced conventional weapons, near real time reconnaissance and modern command and control architectures. A series of new systems including television equipped remotely piloted vehicles, satellite communications

equipment and high precision munitions were introduced into the highest readiness military districts and groups of forces. The doctrine was designed to fight NATO in a high intensity conventional conflict. Force restructuring included widespread introduction of infantry combat vehicles and self-propelled artillery with supporting tactics and operational-strategic doctrinal concepts such as theaters of military operation, operational maneuver groups and operational army corps. The cost of doctrine implementation drained resources from a faltering economy. The doctrine was at odds with the political and economic realities in the USSR.

In the mid-1980s, the adherence to the *perestroika* concept accelerated changes in doctrine. Rather than high intensity conventional conflicts, doctrine shifted to reflect an emphasis on strategic defense. Resistance from military leaders such as Ogarkov and his supporters were replaced by officers more inclined to "reasonable sufficiency." In 1985, doctrine was redefined to support increasing political, economic and societal concerns. A "reasonable sufficiency" doctrine which called for deep strike systems, offensive fighter aircraft and a broad logistics train was pursued until 1990. The USSR continued to react to a NATO buildup and developed a force structure which was not designed for LICs.

1990 featured a shift in doctrine and force structure as the Warsaw Pact collapsed and Russia attempted to reconstitute a military force which was far smaller and less reliant on a Soviet-style conscript army. Efforts to create a noncommissioned officer corps based on contractual terms of service rather than conscription were attempted. The pain of this reorganization and restructuring was underway when the Gulf War forced the military to again reconsider and alter doctrine.

In 1993, a fundamental restructuring of Russian doctrine was announced by Grachev and widely disseminated.[25] Post-Gulf doctrine moved from one of defensive sufficiency to a more offensive doctrine which emphasized MTR technologies including central control, airpower, precision engagement, and stealth. The Gulf conflict had a profound affect on the military which wanted a force structure and strategy to conduct high technology war in a manner similar to that envisioned by Ogarkov rather than the more likely LIC which was encountered in Chechnya. Embedded in the newest doctrine was the concept of supporting ground force movement with overwhelming air support. Follow-on operations included using air strikes to augment artillery and a final air offensive to support ground forces advances. The doctrine and it's execution were planned by a General Staff which was wedded to a doctrine which viewed low intensity and counterinsurgency operations as aberrations. The success of Coalition forces against Iraq reinforced their conviction. The doctrine and force structure which were used in Chechnya were similar to those used in Afghanistan. Russia forgot that it lost the war in Afghanistan as it prepared for a war which was never to be fought. Russia's enemies were more likely to be on the lower end of the conflict spectrum rather than NATO or Coalition-style forces.[26]

Military Objectives

The initial military objective in Chechnya was to eliminate aircraft on airfields, helicopters, air defenses and other forces which might threaten Russian airpower or ground forces while they moved forward. The objective was to be achieved through an air offensive by frontal aviation, air armies and strategic air forces. The Chechen air force

was considered to be a minor threat. While a realistic objective in a mid-to-high intensity war, the emphasis placed on the destruction of the Chechen air force was not justified by the threat it posed. The resources expended on the destruction of a relatively insignificant force did not meet the national objectives. Ground objectives included seizing government facilities within Grozny which also had little bearing on the national objectives if Dudayev and his followers were not eliminated.

After the offensive bogged down, operations focused on key facilities such as airports and lines of communication and isolation and destruction of rebel forces. These objectives supported some national objectives but they were not coordinated and were poorly executed. The force structure was unsuited for the type of operations and objectives which were pursued. Airpower was designed for operations against NATO. A strategic bomber force for example, is of limited use against your own population. Mechanized forces could not chase insurgents in towns and mountains and air forces could do no more than seal major passes and screen the area in economy of force operations. Light infantry forces were not trained in counterinsurgency operations.

Combat Readiness

Moscow miscalculated and used the military without a sound assessment of capabilities. Military capability is largely determined by combat readiness, which is the measure of a force to successfully conduct operations against a hostile force. Prior to the Chechen invasion some analysts felt the Russian military was a well equipped and led, combat experienced, 1.7 million man force. The outcome of the invasion revealed that it was an undermanned, underfunded, ill-equipped, demoralized group without a viable

doctrine capable of beating a band of rebels. The armed forces ceased to be a classic mobilization-based force after the fall of the USSR but it was also not a modern professional army.

The degradation in combat readiness and the relationship of that degradation to Chechnya was verifiable. The collapse of the USSR led to severe funding shortfalls. Defense spending fell over 75 percent in six years. In contrast, the US defense budget fell less than 35 percent in over seven years. The draconian cuts were exacerbated by the unforecasted reallocation of funds to combat operations.

> 80 percent of the airfields experience a dire shortage of fuel. As a result, almost one quarter of the military pilots cannot fly the required number of hours.—Colonel General Vorobev, chief, MOD department of budget and financing…big problems arose with supplying transport aviation with fuel.—Colonel General Podkolzin, commander, army airborne troops.

Half of the emergency stocks have been used up. There is no fuel!—Lieutenant General Gorupay, chief, MOD fuel directorate.

Fuel shortages exemplified the degradation in combat readiness. Only 33 percent of 1995 defense fuel requirements were filled and Chechen operations depleted almost 25 percent of this amount forcing units to economize with measures such as reduction in flight hours.

Flight hours are an indicator of proficiency and readiness. Transport pilots met their minimum flight norms while flying daily operations and Chechen support. Frontal aviation pilots met 30 percent of their norms but this percentage is deceiving because the 4th Air Army, supporting Chechen operations, flew 86 percent of their norms thus inflating the overall figure.

Air defense aviation also suffered. Shortages rendered one-half of all aircraft unflightworthy. Pilots received a maximum of 40-42 hours of annual flight time while 50 hours is required to retain minimal flying proficiency. A far greater amount of time is required to achieve a degree of combat readiness. As a comparison, US pilots receive at least 100 hours of proficiency training annually.[27]

The armed forces fell from 5.4 million men in 1985 to 1.7 million in 1995. There was an exceptional shortage of trained specialists, junior officers and experienced mid-grade officers. Inductees were of the less educated and less healthy strata of society. Units were 50 percent manned. Naval Infantry units in Chechnya filled their ranks with sailors with no ground force experience. Rear service units had even lower manning levels. Uncommitted units backfilled deployed units while contending with lack of personnel and resources, dislocations caused by withdrawal of forces from the former Warsaw Pact and the transition in doctrine, strategy and force structure.

Russia's troops are not in a position to join military actions either physically or theoretically. They are understaffed. Only 40 percent of the personnel are available now. Colonel General Semionov, commander, ground troops.

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Chapter 5

The Air Campaign

Blockade And Covert Operations

The air force became involved in the effort to subdue Chechnya in August 1994 when Air Defense Aviation imposed an air blockade. The blockade and operations supporting anti-Dudayev factions represented the first phase of the air campaign. Participating aircraft included Mi-8 helicopters, MiG-31 and Su-27 interceptors and A-50 early warning aircraft. The blockade prevented a flow of heavy weapons. It was unsuccessful in stopping individuals and small convoys from infiltrating with money, small, high technology weapons and small arms from Azerbaijan. There is evidence that the Chechens attempted to break through the blockade but the success of these efforts was limited.[1] The blockade was condemned by neighboring countries but they could not force the Russians to lift it. The blockade was initially successful because of Russian airpower dominance, cross-country mobility and the lack of roads and airfields which limited areas to be monitored. As the operation progressed, a major weakness in this application of military power was revealed—time. In contemporary times, blockades can't halt the flow of electronic information, commerce and the physical transfer of small high technology

weapons. Even if a complete blockade was achieved, few governments or national wills can bear the slow strangulation results achieved by a blockade.[2]

Covert and clandestine air operations were launched preceding the invasion to deliver supplies and personnel to forces resisting Dudayev. Most operations were conducted by the Counterintelligence Service which provided helicopters, aircraft and advisors to opposition forces. Dudayev's National Guard destroyed a number of helicopters and aircraft piloted by "Russian advisors." Covert air operations were ineffective. They lacked the advantages of special operations such as secrecy and surprise as well as conventional airpower advantages such as speed and range. Few national objectives were decisively supported by the special operations.[3]

The failure of covert action and impatience with economic blockade lent the political perception of ineptitude tantamount to defeat. Frustration and defeat are bitter pills to swallow. This led Moscow to more drastic action particularly when the defense minister promised a quick, inexpensive and surgical victory similar to that of the United States in Haiti. The leadership acted with emotion rather than reason. Overall, the success of the first air phase was mixed. Covert operations were largely unsuccessful. The blockade, performed under nearly ideal conditions, stemmed the flow of most equipment but a constant trickle of Chechen supplies continued throughout the conflict. More importantly, the first phase did not achieve the desired national objectives.

Air Superiority

The second phase of the air campaign took place between 27 November and late December 1994. Su-25 and Su-27 squadrons from the Akhtyubinsk Flight Test Research

Center, flown by some of the best pilots in the Russian Air Force, staged from Mozdok and struck the Chechen 1st Separate Air Squadron at the Grozny, Khankaly and Kalinovka airfields in a surprise attack. The second phase was fully successful. All Chechen aircraft were eliminated prior to the ground attack with no Russian losses reported.[4] Runways were catered with concrete-piercing bombs to insure outside support for the rebels could not be introduced. The air superiority campaign was enormously effective and displayed speed, surprise and the offensive spirit. It was critical in developing the conditions to meet the objectives through ground operations.

While successful, the Chechen force consisted of trainers, transports, obsolescent fighters and helicopters operating from three closely spaced bases, hardly a first rate force.[5] Most Chechen air defense systems and their command and control network were also eliminated. Neutralization of the ground air defenses as well as the air forces was essential in attaining Russian air superiority. The air defense network was rudimentary. No surveillance or warning radar's were operational thus facilitating Russian surprise. Air defense systems included obsolescent antiaircraft machine-guns and cannons most of which were rapidly overwhelmed. Despite Russian efforts, several air defense batteries continued to engage aircraft for two weeks after the invasion began and a ZSU-23-4 was located and destroyed as late as March 1995.[6] Some short range surface-to-air missiles (SHORAD) were used by insurgent forces.[7] Aircraft lacked countermeasures except for flares to defeat infrared guided missiles. SHORADs are preferred insurgent weapons forcing aircraft out of effective close air support (CAS) range. Effectively employed, SHORADs are one of the few weapons rebels can use to launch an offensive against enemy airpower.

Close Air Support And Air Interdiction

The third phase of the campaign focused on CAS and air interdiction (AI) by helicopters and Su-24, Su-25 and Tu-22 aircraft. Mi-24s staging from Mozdok provided convoy escort and CAS for advancing Russian columns. A preferred tactic was to run Chechen troops down on roads and destroy them with machine-guns and rockets.[8] Airpower inflicted heavy casualties on Chechen forces. Helicopters and aircraft provided CAS to defensive strongpoints whenever the ground maneuver units bogged down. Airfields were captured and helicopters initially used them as alighting areas and later as bases. Eventually, fixed wing aircraft resumed use of the airfields. This reduced reaction times and provided airmobile reaction forces to ground commanders. Poor intelligence resulted in some attacks against anti-Dudayev villages which encouraged the inhabitants to unite with the insurgents in common defense of the homeland. Chechen tactics coupled with poor Russian tactical intelligence, resulted in few significant targets being attacked during this phase of the campaign. The principle of applying mass on critical enemy objectives was lost. Collateral damage, ground-to-air coordination problems and inaccuracy of air strikes were noted but overall, the CAS and AI campaigns of the third phase were successful. Chechen forces took heavy losses and were forced to retreat in the face of overwhelming airpower despite lackluster Russian ground operations. It became clear that air operations, no matter how successful, must operate in concert with ground forces to assure the defeat of insurgents.[9]

Counterinsurgency

As Chechen units reverted to guerrilla warfare, air force operations moved into a fourth phase—counterinsurgency missions. These which were basically an extension of the CAS and AI missions. Su-25 aircraft conducted preplanned attacks against isolated rebel bands and sealed rebels off from the population areas. In general, most operations exhibited a lack of flexibility and initiative. Fixed targets were the preferred targets and rebel forces were rarely surprised by ad hoc attacks of targets of opportunity. High precision munitions (HPM) were used against precisely located targets when rebels attempted to stand and fight. Aircraft flew above small arms range to conduct security and strike reconnaissance missions. Helicopters were used to conduct medical evacuation and psychological operations. Airmobile operations were conducted to disrupt the rebel's rear areas. These assaults were not coordinated with ground maneuver units and the assaulting forces were often left without air support.

A core characteristic of airpower is the capability to travel quickly over long distances. Distance provided a degree of protection from rebel attack at the expense of reaction time. Russia initially staged from airfields located outside of Chechnya. Chechen rebels launched several unsuccessful forays against bases located just beyond the borders but they were easily thwarted. Once Chechen airfields were seized and restored to use the Russians found they had entered a morass of air base defense. Ground forces deployed near airfields found themselves defending fixed vulnerable targets at the sake of offensive counterinsurgency operations. Helicopters were diverted to perimeter security flights. Fixed wing aircraft, particularly transports, became targets of standoff attacks. Russia created the conditions favorable for Chechen ground attacks by moving

aircraft and support units into the battle area. Russia abrogated the technical advantage of airpower by stationing it in the close combat area. In WW II, 8 percent of Axis aircraft in North Africa were destroyed by commando raids. 1,300 US aircraft were destroyed or damaged by guerrilla attacks in Vietnam. 180 Soviet aircraft were lost on the ground to *Mujahideen* fire in Afghanistan. Russia repeated these failures.[10] Overall, the fourth phase, perhaps the most crucial, was a failure. In the final analysis, air power did not defeat the insurgents and the conflict was lost.

Other Missions

A number of missions were conduced in parallel with the four phases of the air campaign. LRA Tu-22 bombers were involved in operations from the onset. In June 1995, approximately 60 percent of all LRA sorties flown were in support of Chechen operations conducting illumination missions, propaganda leaflet drops and bombing. Bombing accuracy was criticized by the media, international observers and some military leaders. The air force claimed success if bombs landed within 150 meters of the target. Ground commanders noted they took as many casualties from the bombings as they did from enemy mortar fires. Tu-22 aircraft, flying above ground fires, bombed area targets. "A thick fog hovers over the city. Visibility is zero and, from a height of 6,000 to 7,000 meters our planes rain down bombs helter skelter with an almost 100 percent probability of hitting some of their own men."[11] Even fighter-bombers flew high above the effective range of small arms fire thus reducing their accuracy. This lack of offensive spirit compounded the difficulties of ground forces and increased the criticism of all bombing. Collateral damage in villages created movement nightmares for Russian forces and

havens for the insurgents. The Russian advantages of mobility, mass and speed were negated in streets strewn with rubble. Eventually, saturation bombing was halted due to lack of accuracy.[12]

The mounting number of friendly and civilian casualties from "saturation" bombing caused resistance to grow. Bombings directed against the general population may be useful in "herding" people as a population control measure but the loss of popular support outweighs this short-term advantage. The Chechen experience suggest bombing of population centers can harden the will of the people rather than break their resistance. The loss of media support, the hardening of popular resistance, and friendly fire casualties all suggest widespread and indiscriminate bombing in LICs is counterproductive in many situations.

Military Transport Aviation made a powerful showing during the invasion build up. Transports ferried major portions of an airborne division and two rifle regiments with organic equipment to airheads just beyond the Chechen border in 24 hours. In a 60 day period, a cluge of Il-71, An-12, An-22 and An-124 aircraft flew 492 sorties carrying 22,000 men, 1140 vehicles and over 3,000 metric tons of cargo.[13] Transports generally remained outside of the combat area. Helicopters and ground convoys moved units into Chechnya. Mozkok airfield was 110 kilometers from Grozny, fairly secure from rebel ground attack but minutes by helicopter and a few hours by convoy. Mozkok served as the primary air base and headquarters for the air campaign. A high sortie rate was maintained suggesting good readiness rate and high pilot proficiency. Airlifts moved tailored packages quickly and with relative immunity from ambush.[14]

Little information is currently available on other air force missions including medical evacuation, mine laying or sweeping, airborne and airmobile operations, resupply and reconnaissance. That which exists in open sources is generally favorable. This suggests no major problems or strengths occurred.

Strengths And Weaknesses

The killing of Dudayev provides an example of the technological advantage airpower brought to LICs. Cellular telephone transmissions were intercepted by an airborne collection platform. Su-24s were vectored to the target and destroyed it with laser-guided munitions, probably AS-12 air-to-surface missiles. Target illumination may have been accomplished by a forward air controller. The "decapitation" of the enemy commander briefly degraded control systems and disrupted synchronization but it did not provide a decisive blow. Killing Yamamoto during World War II and Operation *El Dorado Canyon* in the 1980s were propaganda victories but they had little effect on future events. The same was true in the Dudayev operation. Contemporary airpower theorists suggest that killing or attacking individual leaders is essential to an air campaign.[15] This remains unproved. The vacuum created by the death of a single individual can be filled and the replacement may be better for the enemy than the person who was killed. Nevertheless, the near-real-time aspect of the Dudayev attack was significant. Virtually all emissions could be located, identified, targeted rapidly and attacked with precision. Insurgents were vulnerable to attack immediately after detection.[16] The attack may herald a new capability in air power precision strike capabilities which is far more timely and lethal.

The overall use of HPMs was less successful than the Dudayev attack would suggest. Most Russian aircraft could not carry HPMs. The munitions were expensive and, in many cases, the cost of destroying a rebel target did not warrant HPM use. Precision munitions were in short supply due to their cost. HPM strikes sometimes lacked accuracy even against precisely located, fixed targets. Repeated sorties were required to destroy bunkers, power plants and TV stations suggesting that munitions lacked accuracy or pilots lacked employment training.[17]

Yogi Berra might say, "The night is half of the day." Theorists of modern combat state a successful force must dominate the night. Guerrilla forces relied on darkness for surprise and concealment. Russian forces were surprised and attacked under cover of darkness with devastating effect. Aircraft were handicapped by the inability to conduct effective nighttime operations using image enhancement, radar, thermal, or infrared sensors. Aircraft were hampered by the lack of modern night vision devices (NVDs) to discriminate between friend or foe and to deliver fires accurately.[18] Illumination missions conducted by aircraft were not cost-effective. They had questionable utility and exposed aircraft to unnecessary harm. Su-24 aircraft had the best NVD capability and they shouldered most of the night sorties regardless of the appropriateness of the mission.

Russians experienced air-to-ground communications failures and delays in sensor-to-shooter data transfer. The problem was partially caused by obsolete equipment and radio incompatibility. Systems were in poor repair and lacked acuity. The command structure didn't permit direct communications between ground troops and the supporting aircraft. This resulted in uncoordinated attacks and friendly fire casualties as did the lack of simple techniques including use of visual signals to mark friendly fires. Targets acquired

by A-50 aircraft and reconnaissance aircraft were not transferred directly to strike platforms. This led to unacceptable time delays and loss of targets. Eventually air strikes were coordinated by forward air controllers (FACs). When coupled with lack of NVDs, troops had CAS only in good daylight weather. Even when CAS was available, accuracy was doubtful. Rebel electronic countermeasures including issuing false target designations, net intrusions and radio electronic combat directed against FAC nets further compounded command and control problems.[19]

Control problems were exacerbated by confusion created by the rules of engagement (ROE). "If Grozny were not a Russian city, it could be taken by storm in a matter of hours by using truly destructive weapons superior to the militants' arms. Political decisions to stop the bombing and shelling can be taken 100 times a day."[20] "Can we shoot at it or not? Troops are not allowed to fire on targets despite taking fire. Certain individuals in Moscow have tried to give instructions to units already in combat. This is not a war. Lately, we are told to avoid any actions that could derail the peace talks."[21] The frustration and confusion over ROE may have contributed to the military's disobedience of guidance issued by Moscow to halt bombings.

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Chapter 6

What Does The Future Hold?

Russia negotiated a five year cease-fire with Chechen forces in August 1996. Russian forces have been withdrawn and local elections were held. It is unlikely that this truce will hold. Elements in the military and the government do not favor a cease-fire.[1] Russia did not achieve it's national objectives or military goals. Russia's fundamental reasons of the invasion still remained. Chechnya was not broken. In July 1996, Chechen General Basayev said, "We had to make them (Russians) understand that we will never give our country away." The Chechens are reportedly burying weapons to resume the struggle. Dudayev noted, "The war will last at least 50 years."[2] 90,000 people died and thousands were displaced yet Russia and Chechnya had nothing to show for it.

Military Coup

Chechnya may be the straw that broke the treasury's back. The attempt to maintain a guns and butter economy was unsound. Estimates of the cost to rebuild the region range upward to 15 trillion rubles or approximately 6 percent of the federal budget. This does not include resettlement costs for over 200,000 displaced persons and the hundreds of millions of rubles required for veteran compensation. The cost of maintaining military operations during hostilities was approximately 25 million rubles daily. Domestic

services were cut in 1995 and 1996. Alexander Lebed aptly stated, "A pauper country with a doddering economy cannot afford the luxury of fighting a war."[3] Even wealthy nations suffer from the cost of an insurgency where the military costs to the state are protracted and increased but the industrial sector of the economy does not benefit from profits of increased wartime production.

Deputy Prime Minister Soskovets said, "The task of restoring everything that has been destroyed in the republic is not worth it. We should strengthen the rural districts first of all, so that urban people, should they so desire, can build homes for themselves in the countryside."[4] Obviously, such a restoration effort would be unacceptable to the Chechens.

If Russia lacks the funds to restore the economy, it is unlikely to willingly pay to refit a military which squandered it's might in Chechnya. According to Colonel General Vorobyev, the 1996 defense budget ."..is absolutely insufficient for the Russian armed forces. The appropriations will put the army and the navy on the verge of survival and the armed forces cannot be a reliable guarantor of national security and state integrity of Russia with such a level of financing." The military faces a growing disparity between the need for modernization and training and a lack of funding.

The defeat in Chechnya was a staggering blow not so much in loss of men or weapons but in damage to reputation and morale, vital pieces of a disciplined force. A decade ago USSR's armed forces were among the strongest in the world. Those of Russia are in a state of disarray. When the army falls apart, the state falls apart too. A wounded military could become a destabilizing influence in a country straddling democracy and tyranny. The military could turn into an independent political force

making demands on the civil government. Many officers believe apolitical behavior is the correct path but others endorse an unprecedented involvement in politics. The officer corps is disenchanted with the society and the political leadership. They believe, "Democracy …is not possible. We have suffered through democracy with the army and saw the results in Chechnya."[5] The majority of officers polled believe a firm hand in politics is necessary. The dislike of the Chechen mission, disaffection with their social station and alienation from the leadership presents a set of conditions ripe for a coup.[6] The historically professional and loyal military will be hard-pressed not to forcibly claim a greater part of the budget in a backlash which could end Russia's move to democracy and market reform. Indeed, some military authors suggest this shall be the case.

Playing The Nuclear Card

The Russian military will likely be relatively weak for the next 10-20 years. The force is decimated and prestige will take years to recover from the defeats of the past two conflicts. Equipment is rapidly aging and cannot be maintained. For example, the helicopter force is well over two decades old and has reached the end of it's service life. According to one analyst, helicopters are, "worn out and fitted with obsolete…ammunition and on-board equipment." The fixed wing fleet is in no better condition.[7] Losses were low in the air force, probably less than 50 planes and helicopters were destroyed or damaged but they are unlikely to be replaced. Neither are aircraft which have shortened life cycles as the result of flying approximately 30,000 sorties supporting Chechnya. These sorties stressed the useful service life of the aging air fleet. Any effort to introduce and integrate newer equipment will take years. The force is

undermanned, ill-trained and unfunded. The sole viable component of military power is the nuclear arsenal.

The strategic nuclear force remains the best funded and equipped service. It continues to hold great prestige with the leadership and much of the population. It was unsullied by the Afghan and Chechen debacles. Given the failure of the conventional force, Russia may rely more heavily on it's nuclear option. The weapons of last resort could become the option of choice particularly given a recent emphasis in professional journals on the utility of tactical nuclear devices in contemporary war.

Notes

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Chapter 7

Lessons Learned

Objectives were unclear and ill-defined. This was a major reason for the failure of the campaign. The military strategy was unsound reflecting an incorrect assessment of requirements for military power. Initial air force objectives were defined and attained through the air blockade and the destruction of the enemy air force but the potent capability of airpower achieved few objectives of military significance after the destruction of the Chechen air force.

The initial assault seized the initiative but the spirit of the offensive was not evident in most units and many leaders. The offensive rapidly devolved into defensive and reactive operations as the ground campaign came to a halt. The defense of strongpoints was ineffective. Russian forces did not retain or exploit the initiative. They did not pursue Chechen forces into the southern portion of the republic thus they relinquished over a third of the battle area to the enemy without a struggle despite overwhelming military strength. Air force units also exhibited a lack of offensive spirit. Audacious operations were not undertaken. Campaigns to interdict key rebel nodes were not developed or conducted. Pilots erred on the side of personal safety often flying too high to provide effective support to ground forces.

Unity of command was a significant problem. Widespread discontent was noted within the political hierarchy, the *Duma* and the military leadership. Turmoil within the political structure hindered the military effort. In addition to the "normal" debates within a fledgling democracy concerning national objectives and the national defense, Russia suffered from domestic political instability. The threat of a coup and the frequent changes in the leadership distracted the military and the civilian leaders. The discontent diffused the war effort and compounded planning difficulties. The absence of national-level military coordination and direction was evident. Frequent turnovers of commanders and their dramatic shifts in the direction of operations were counterproductive. The number of relief's from command suggest poor skills in many Russian officers and an intolerance of anything less than success. Unity of effort between air and ground commanders was not evident. The campaign of the LRA bore little relationship to the needs of the ground commanders for example.

Surprise was crucial to the initial "takedown" of the Chechen air force. Chechen forces recognized that an operation was afoot but Russian forces achieved surprise regarding the precise target and timing of the attack. After the initial assault, units did not employ the principle of surprise during their operations. The advantage of surprise was often lost to the Chechens.[1]

Simplicity was not evident in the campaign. The initial assault was complicated. Russian military critiques noted that complexity and lack of coordination was a shortfall in the planning of all aspects of the operation. The Russians applied mass by mounting overwhelming numerical strength. Military leaders stressed a concept of mass which was developed for combat by a conscript force against NATO. Mass wasn't as useful against

the dispersed insurgent force. Russia also failed to synchronize all elements of their combat power against the rebels.

Economy of force operations were evident as the campaign evolved into guerrilla warfare. Screening forces, including aircraft, were used to bottle up rebels in mountain and village strongholds. The Russians had a tendency to work sequentially rather than in parallel. They were unable to move rapidly to the decisive point at the required time.

Operational and tactical security were not evident. The Russian military suffered from arrogance which resulted in immediate and significant setbacks. Lapses in security permitted rebel forces to exploit weaknesses and attack at the places and times of their choosing. The Chechens consistently acquired unanticipated advantages displaying superior flexibility, initiative and intelligence. Russians were overly cautious. This affected the conduct of the war.

Russian forces did not exploit their capability to outmaneuver the “foot mobile” rebels. Assaults were limited and roadbound. Russians did not display flexible application of combat power. Freedom of action was relinquished as airfields and towns were seized and defended as enclaves.

The government did not provide adequate support to the military and fund a force which was capable of accomplishing the missions levied upon on it. Russia didn’t plan or prepare the invasion force nor did it dedicate the resources required to continue the fight after war moved from conventional to guerrilla war. Without support any military will eventually fail.

The military failed to provide civil leaders a realistic assessment of the enemy’s capabilities. It misread the Chechen situation. The military universally reported success

to the leadership who made key decisions based on the faulty data. A certain degree of military contempt for civilians and minorities also manifested itself during the conflict and they lost most opportunities to win the support of the local populace. Had the Russians considered the lessons of past encounters such as Afghanistan, they might not have acted so rashly in 1994. The military lingered in the past, clinging to a doctrine more suited for a well-equipped force designed to fight a conventional, high intensity war. It did not build the force structure, doctrine, and strategy for LICs.

Decision makers also failed to assess the economic condition of the Federation and the national will. Before any conflict is undertaken, it is essential to objectively consider whether the economy and population will support it. It is also important for national and military leaders to display a public face of solidarity. In light of the power of the media, it is important to cultivate the national will and insure the media will not subvert government policies.

It appears that religion and ethnic conflict are seriously underrated by western analysts who focus on reasons such as stability and territorial integrity. In Chechnya, "primal" reasons were major causes for the conflict. After the war began, national survival became a driving force for the Chechens. Russia ignored this and underestimated the will of it's enemy to continue to fight in the face of superior enemy forces. Survival is the strongest of all reasons to fight.

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Appendix A

Chronology

1996

- September 1: Leaders of the Russian-supported government leave the region.
- August 26: Helicopters take Lebed to meet rebel leaders. The leaders agree that Chechnya will drop the demand for independence for five years. A referendum will be held. Russia will abide by the results and withdraw the military. The helicopters leave early because, "It is not safe to wait for hours in enemy territory."
- August 18: VIP flights to Chechnya are noted. Helicopters fly over Grozny despite cease-fire.
- August 15: Su-25s attack refugee caravan with rockets. Aircraft and helicopters attack other civilian targets. The rebels surround Khankala and Severny airfields.
- August 13: Russia announces it would not use airpower to attack rebels. Mi-24s continue CAS operations. Fighters perform air patrols.
- August 8-9: Mi-24s and fighter-bombers attack positions in Grozny. Mi-24s conduct "anti-sniper" missions using rockets.
- June 26: Aircraft strike Chechens' mountain bases and village strongholds.
- May 7: Helicopters attack the market in Urus Martan. Russian commanders deny they carried out the attacks.[1]
- May 5: Rebel forces shoot down a Su-25 flying a reconnaissance mission.
- April 21: Dudayev is killed in an HPM air strike.
- April 15: Rebels shoot down a helicopter.[2]
- April 13: Air operations include attacks on southwest Chechnya.[3]
- April 5: Commanders say they will continue "special operations" including bombing despite Yeltsin's peace initiative. Rebels shoot down a jet.[4]
- April 2: The Russian commander denies ordering the bombing attacks on two Chechen villages that had signed peace pacts with the Russian military.
- March 30: Russian commander apologies for unauthorized bombing of Katyr-Yurt which had signed a peace accord.[5]
- March 24: Russian forces launch air and artillery strikes on villages southwest of Grozny.
- March 22: Aircraft launch strikes on villages throughout the region.[6]

- March 14: Aircraft strike Bamut.[7] [8]
- March 9: Chechnya rebels hijack a Cypriot jet to Germany to publicize their cause.[9]
- March 6: The rebels shoot down an aircraft. Helicopters attack rebels in the border area[10]
- March 3-6: Helicopters fire rockets at Sernovodsk during the Russian offensive.[11]
- February 16-21: Russian troops counterattack into Novogroznensky after heavy saturation bombing. Commanders claim that civilians fled through special escape corridors.
- February 15: Planes bomb the Presidential Palace.
- February 14: Yeltsin promises to continue air strikes in Chechnya.[12]

- January 9-15: Russia bombs Pervomaiskaya after rebels seize more than 100 hostages. The rebels escape but helicopters fire on withdrawal.[13]

1995

- December 27: Yelt'sen orders aerial bombing stopped. The order is ignored.
- December 21: Airmobile operations are conducted near Gudermes.
- December 14-24: Grozny is bombed by aircraft with conventional and HPMs. The TV station, Interior Ministry building and Presidential Palace are attacked.
- December 1995-January 1996: Heavy fighting breaks out in Gudermes. The rebels escape from the besieged settlement despite air attacks.
- October 9: Aircraft bomb and rocket villages in the Urus Martan district.[14]
- August 22: Fighters and helicopters attack Argun.
- June 15: Helicopters conduct security missions around airfields and along roads. A helicopter regiment based near Budyonnovsk is attacked.[15]
- May/June: Su-24s attack rebel mountain and village strongholds.
- May 12: Fighters attack Shatoy in CAS role.
- April 27-11 May: Cease-fire announced by Russians who control the lowlands (during the day).
- April 20: Russian troops depart Bamut under pressure. Their withdrawal is supported by aircraft. Aircraft attack Arshty and Serzhen-Yurt.[16]
- April 15: Russian troops and aircraft attack Bamut. Aircraft perform CAS and HPM attacks against reinforced targets. Aircraft attack Gudermes.[17]
- April 9: Aircraft attack Samashki, Achkhoi-Martan and Bamut.[18]
- April 7: Rebels launch attacks on the Grozny North Airport.[19]
- February 28: Aircraft and helicopters attack a number of villages. A rebel antiaircraft battery is destroyed. VIP helicopter flights are conducted.[20]
- February 20: Su-25s attack southern Grozny. Bombers strike rebel villages.[21]
- February 14-20: The Khankala Airport is shelled.
- February 11: Aircraft attack rebels in Argun and Samashki.

- February 2: Gudermes and Bamut are bombed. An airmobile force attacks Prigorodnoye.[22]
- February: The rebel SAM downs an Su-25.[23] A Border Service helicopter damaged.[24]
- January 10: Su-27 aircraft inadvertently bomb Russian troops.
- January 6: Units conduct an airmobile attack on Grozny. The units establish improvised perimeter defense fire bases supported by helicopter and aircraft CAS.[25]
- January 3: Air attacks damage an oil refinery. 250 and 500 kg HE bombs and rockets are used against villages.[26]
- January 2: Five air raids strike the market in Shali. Mi-24s flights fly convoy security missions.[27]
- January 1: Day and night air strikes are conducted over Grozny.

1994

- December 31: Aircraft attack a Chechen oil refinery. Russia denies the strikes.[28]
- December 29: Aircraft fly dozens of missions bombing rebel forces near Grozny. Other villages are bombed and rocketed. The Khankala airfield is captured by Russian forces.
- December 28: Aircraft allegedly halt attacks on civil targets.
- December 27: Yeltsin states civil targets will no longer be attacked by aircraft.
- December 23: Air planes conduct preplanned HE bomb and rocket attacks in Grozny.[29]
- December 21-24: Fighter-bombers attack Grozny day and night. Su-25s bomb and rocket residential and military targets. HPMs destroy a bridge and Dudayev's helicopter. Katayama is heavily bombed. Helicopters attack rebel formations near Petropavlovskaya.[30]
- December 17-29: Fighter-bombers strike Grozny and rebels with rockets and bombs. Tu-22s strike TV stations, power, gas and water plants. Helicopters engage in CAS. Fighters buzz the capital and airfields.
- December 14: Fighters attack Grozny. Bombers attack the Grozny airfields and conduct illumination missions. Su-27s engage in counterbattery fire. Mi-24s conduct CAS.
- December 12: Helicopters and fighter-bombers attack Grozny. Flares are employed against IR-guided missiles. Helicopters and aircraft attack rebel forces throughout the country.[31]
- December 11: Russian troops invade Chechnya.
- December 6-8: Russian aircraft strike Chechen targets. Reconnaissance and psychological "presence" flights over Grozny occur. VIP and airlift sorties to Mozdok are noted.[32]
- November 29: Yeltsen announces Chechnya is in the Russian vital national interest. Ground attack aircraft strike Chechen airfields.

- November 27: Dudayev supporters shoot down four helicopters and an Su-25. It is unclear if the aircraft "officially" belong to the opposition or Russia. An opposition helicopter attacks Grozny.
- October 3-16: Dudayev's opponents, supported by Russian helicopters, attempt to seize Gronzny.
- September 29: Anti-Dudayev forces conduct rocket attacks Grozny airports with Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters.
- August 11: 34 Russian Air Defense Aviation aircraft and the Federal Border Service blockade Chechnya. Covert air operations are conducted in support of Dudayev's opponents.[33]
- August 7: Russia suspends all flights from Russian airports to Grozny.[34]

1993

- Several Chechens are arrested in London, UK attempting to purchase 2000 Stinger SAMs.

1992

- May: The Defense Minister signs over most Russian Army equipment in Chechnya to Dudayev.

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